



# Planning and readiness of the national civil protection system



Latvijas Republikas  
Valsts kontrole

Rīga 2022

## Audit report

Planning and readiness of the national civil protection system

27 September 2022

Compliance audit “Can nationally defined civil protection policy ensure the establishment of an effective civil protection and disaster management system in line with good practice recognized at the EU level and legislation adopted??”

The audit was performed by Auditor-Lawyer Ruta Kalnača, Senior State Auditor-Lawyer Agnese Caune (from 20 September 2021), Senior State Auditor-Lawyer Evita Drobiševska (from 2 September 2021 to 1 April 2022), Head of responsible Sector Kaiva Skalbiņa, and Department Director Kristīne Jaunzeme based on audit schedule No 2.4.1-2/2021 of the Second Audit Department of the State Audit Office of 13 January 2021.

Audited entities: the Ministry of the Interior and the State Fire and Rescue Service.

The cover design includes an image from the website *Depositphotos, Emergency Flat Icons Set-Vector*, Author *muchmania*, ID: 81706564

## Dear Reader,

We have completed an audit on the planning and readiness of the national civil protection system. We conducted the audit at a time when the global agenda was largely determined by the COVID-19 pandemic, and when the audit was under finalisation phase, Russia started a war in Ukraine, therefore, we paid increased attention to the management of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as assessed the performance of the institutions within the civil protection system in relation to the plans for preventive and preparedness measures in case of war and military threat within the audit.

We conclude after the audit that, unfortunately, the prerequisites for effective disaster management and crisis management have not been created in the national civil protection system, improvements are necessary and possible in all segments of the system to prepare for crises better, prevent them as much as possible and overcome them effectively by reducing the negative impact of disasters.

First, streamlining an institutional model of disaster management is required so that there is a clear division of responsibility of the institutions involved in disaster management, the institutions have the necessary resources and capacity at their disposal, and solutions are provided for the management of comprehensive disasters affecting the entire country and many sectors. The existing institutional model of disaster management does not consider the options of its implementation either legally or practically. Largely, a system has been created in which many participate but no one is responsible.

To compensate for the deficits of the existing institutional model of disaster management, it was largely replaced by various ad hoc institutions during the COVID-19 pandemic. The search for the most appropriate pandemic management model continued throughout the pandemic. It is also characteristic that mostly those involved in ad hoc institutions and their leaders were not previously trained and prepared for disaster management in crises, therefore the way of thinking and working methods necessary for managing a crisis had to be learned quickly and during a crisis, often lacking the necessary resources and capacity.

Secondly, reviewing the approach in which national and municipal civil protection plans are elaborated is needed. Civil protection plans might not be useful documents for disaster prevention, ensuring preparedness, response, and mitigation measures if the measures provided for in the plans are only ideas and content, timing, funding, and responsible persons of their implementation are not clear. Civil protection plans should not list everything possible that could ever be done, but they should include real and concrete measures that the responsible institutions must implement within a certain period to prepare for threat and crisis situations as well as possible.

Thirdly, the measures provided for in the plans will not be of much use in a crisis if they are not tested in exercises. Therefore, regular civil protection exercises are needed, which would train crisis preparedness at all levels, verify the appropriateness of planned measures, cooperation mechanisms and availability of resources.

Looking at the possibilities of improving the civil protection and disaster management system, we have examined both the best examples (for instance, Latvian disaster medicine), the experience of other countries (the United Kingdom, Sweden, Lithuania, Estonia, and Germany) and the documents of international institutions during the audit. We hope that the conclusions and recommendations made in the audit will be useful for improving the system.

We thank colleagues of the Ministries of the Interior, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development, the State Chancellery, the State Fire and Rescue Service for their cooperation during the audit. Special thanks to Mr Kaspars Druvaskalns, Head of the SFRS Crisis Management Department, and Mr Kaspars Bērziņš, Advisor to the Minister of Health, for the active involvement and exchange of ideas.

Respectfully  
Ms Kristīne Jaunzeme  
Department Director



## Summary

### Main conclusions

A well-functioning civil protection and disaster management system consists of institutions and officials of different levels and competences, each of which has a clearly defined responsibility and role in disaster management with the aim of reducing the risks of disasters and their potential negative consequences as much as possible by responding quickly to threats and reducing the damage caused by the threat to human lives and national economies.

In recent decades, civil protection systems in the world have focused a lot of attention on preventive measures and better preparedness in order to prevent the threat of disasters as much as possible and to be able to act as efficiently and quickly as possible in the event of a disaster, as well as emphasizing the comprehensive role of civil protection, including the full cycle of measures starting from preventive, preparedness and response measures, and ending with remediation and restoration work<sup>1</sup>. When building the resilience of countries and communities against disasters, the need for targeted activities in sectoral and cross-sectoral areas at all levels is stressed by creating awareness of disaster risks, strengthening disaster risk management, and making investments in disaster risk mitigation to build resilience, as well as improving disaster preparedness for effective elimination of disaster consequences and introducing the principle of “build back better”<sup>2</sup>.

To define a full cycle of disaster management in the law, to determine the mandate of state institutions involved in civil protection and disaster management system more clearly and precisely, and to ensure a uniform understanding of civil protection by the institutions, the Latvia’s Parliament (Saeima) developed and adopted a new Law on Civil Protection and Disaster Management on 5 May 2016. The new Law took effect on 1 October 2016, and its purpose is to determine the mandate of civil protection system and disaster management entities to ensure the safety and protection of people, environment, and property as fully as possible in the event of a disaster or its threat<sup>3</sup>.

To evaluate how the improved system of civil protection and disaster management works, we have conducted an audit looking for an answer to the question whether the policy defined in the country in the field of civil protection can ensure the establishment of an effective system of civil protection and disaster management in accordance with the good practices recognized at the EU level and the adopted laws and regulations. Unfortunately, the answer received in the audit is negative because the policy defined in the country in the field of civil protection does not ensure the establishment of an effective civil protection and disaster management system, and the civil protection and disaster management system is largely a neglected area.

### Unclear division of responsibilities among institutions

Ambiguities and gaps in the distribution of responsibilities of institutions can be decisive in effective crisis<sup>4</sup> management, hindering the preparation and adoption of necessary decisions and taking late actions, because of which the crisis can be deepened, have more negative impact, losses, and more victims.

The deconcentrated and decentralized civil protection and disaster management system created in Latvia foresees the duty of many institutions to participate in disaster management and coordinate disaster management, but the intended cooperation mechanisms and the distribution of the institutions' responsibilities are unclear. A competent line ministry or local or regional government is responsible for the coordination of the management of each disaster and must ensure the involvement of other institutions in disaster management, coordinated and harmonised action of the institutions, but the legal framework and civil protection plans do not provide for and there are no mechanisms for disaster management subjects in practice to implement their expected responsibilities in the coordination of disaster management, for example, how to achieve that the institutions that are not in any kind of subordinate relationship with the subject of disaster management carry out the planned and necessary disaster management measures, how to ensure and influence that the actions of the institutions are mutually coordinated, timely and appropriate for the purposes of disaster management, etc.

---

A clearly defined division of competences of the responsible institutions is an important prerequisite for successful crisis management.

The management of the COVID-19 pandemic shows the weaknesses and necessary improvements of the Latvian disaster management system vividly. Although the Ministry of Health is the subject of disaster management provided for in the Law on Civil Protection and Disaster Management, which must ensure the coordination of pandemic disaster management, the Ministry of Health does not have the authority to ensure the involvement of other line ministries and achieve mutually coordinated action to limit the spread of the pandemic. The legal framework does not provide solutions for the management of comprehensive and multi-sectoral disasters, including the management of disasters such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the disaster management model provided for in the laws and regulations was used fragmentarily, and the search for the most suitable institutional model of crisis management continued throughout the pandemic both by addressing the existing deficits of the disaster management system (for instance, insufficient capacity of the Secretariat of the Crisis Management Council, non-existent institutional and legal framework for the management of comprehensive disasters affecting many areas) and responding to current challenges in crisis management at various stages of its development (for example, the need for coordinating groups of different levels, the need for greater involvement of experts for making informed decisions). Like other countries, various ad hoc institutions and formats were created for mutual coordination and resolution of the issues of limiting the spread of the COVID-19 infection. However, these institutions were not always suitable for solving critical issues, the division of responsibilities and which institution was managing the crisis was not always clear, and the mutual cooperation of the participating institutions was not sufficiently coordinated. It is characteristic that all the ad hoc institutions created during the pandemic, their leaders and members were mostly not trained and prepared for disaster management in crises before, therefore the way of thinking and work methods

necessary for managing a crisis had to be learned quickly and during the crisis, often lacking the necessary resources and capacity.

### Civil protection plans on paper

The planning of the civil protection system established in the country does not ensure the development of such a National Civil Protection Plan and municipal civil protection plans, which would define a set of clearly understandable and specific measures in general that would be really used to prevent threats or when it is necessary to respond to an emerging crisis or its threats immediately.

Preventive measures and preparedness defined in the National Civil Protection Plan are mostly general, they lack specific deadlines very often, there is an unclear distribution of responsibilities, and the source and amount of funding is not defined. Consequently, there is a high probability that disaster management measures aimed at better preparation for potential hazards, preventing them as much as possible or reducing the negative consequences of disasters, are not carried out at all or are not carried out to their full potential. Legal regulation also does not provide requirements for line ministries to develop more detailed plans of preventive and preparedness measures, which would specify particular preventive and preparedness measures to be carried out, achievable results and performance indicators, deadlines, responsible stakeholders, source, and amount of funding. For example, in the event of a flood, the National Civil Protection Plan provides, among others, such general preventive measures as maintenance and construction of amelioration systems, planning, construction and maintenance of highways in the period from 2020 to 2027.

---

The measures provided for in civil protection plans are very general, without clarity on what should be done.

---

Similarly, the response and mitigation measures defined in the National Civil Protection Plan are stipulated at the level of action lines and are sufficiently general, therefore, the State Audit Office considers that the practical usefulness of the National Civil Protection Plan in disaster management might be limited.

In connection with the current geopolitical and security challenges and the need to determine preventive, preparedness, response and mitigation measures in civil protection plans of local and regional governments in the event of war, military invasion or threats thereof, the issue of disaster management measures foreseen in civil protection plans of local and regional governments and the responsibility and involvement of local and regional governments in disaster management was highlighted at the Saima in spring 2022. In this regard, gaps and contradictions in the legal framework have come to light, which are clearly visible in the civil protection plans of local and regional governments included in the audit sample during the audit, as some local and regional governments envisage disaster management measures only for those disasters that they are the subjects of management (collapse of buildings and structures, emergency heat supply, water supply, drainage and sewage system in their administrative territory), and do not envisage measures for other

significant threats that may occur in their territory (for instance, floods, heat, drought, pandemic, epidemic, forest and peat bog fires, etc.).

Similar to the National Civil Protection Plan, disaster management measures in civil protection plans of local and regional governments are mostly defined too generally so that it would be clear what must be done within the framework of these measures, the specific responsible stakeholders are not defined, and the cooperation mechanisms of the participants are not provided, which would be practically applicable in a crisis. Regarding disasters that might occur on the territory of a local or regional government and for the coordination of management of which line ministries are responsible, the local and regional governments often overwrite the measures provided for in the National Civil Protection Plan in their civil protection plans. However, such an approach does not contribute to the successful management of disasters because the civil protection plans of local and regional governments do not determine disaster management measures in accordance with the characteristics of the respective territory and the structure of its population, the needs of the population and the measures to ensure them and the cooperation mechanisms of involved institutions are not defined and so on.

### Risk assessment within sectors

Perhaps, such a formal approach to defining disaster management measures in municipal civil protection plans relates both to gaps in the legal framework and the established approach to disaster risk assessment. Although a qualitative risk assessment is essential for assessing and predicting the most appropriate actions in disaster management, reducing the likelihood of disasters and their negative effects, and defining preventive, preparedness, response, and mitigation measures based precisely on the risk assessment, disaster risk assessment does not provide cross-sectoral cooperation and multi-risk assessment<sup>5</sup>.

The responsible ministries carry out risk assessments within their own sector, involving other stakeholders only in very rare cases. Line ministries have not involved local and regional governments in any disaster risk assessment, although local and regional governments can be affected by all the disasters mentioned in the National Civil Protection Plan. Public consultations have not been conducted, and the public has not been informed about the risk assessment process and results, which threatens society's ability to prepare and participate in disaster management measures, as well as generally weakens public resilience against various crises. The public also does not have easily accessible, up-to-date, and comprehensible information about disaster risk assessments and measures for their management.

---

The public is not involved in risk assessment, and the public does not have access to useful information about civil protection measures.

### The execution of civil protection plans is not evaluated and monitored

No effective monitoring mechanisms have been established for the assessment and monitoring of the implementation of state and municipal civil protection plans. The leading institutions of civil protection, that is, the Ministry of the Interior and the State Fire and Rescue Service, only collect the

information provided by line ministries on the implementation of the National Civil Protection Plan, regardless of the completeness of the information provided, and do not analyse the progress of the plan implementation, hindering conditions, the capacity of institutions, necessary improvements etc. The National Civil Protection Plan also does not have a deadline for its implementation and revision, and no institution evaluates the progress of the implementation of municipal civil protection plans.

Taking into account the rapidly changing geopolitical situation and current security challenges, the State Audit Office has gathered information as part of the audit on how the preventive and preparedness measures provided for in the National Civil Protection Plan<sup>6</sup> in the event of war, military invasions or threats thereof are carried out, as well as preventive measures envisaged in the plan of measures for the controlled mass evacuation of the population<sup>7</sup>. We found that four measures have been implemented out of the 15 preventive and preparedness measures provided for in the National Civil Protection Plan, related to ensuring the supply of food, essential goods, and energy resources, protecting cultural heritage, ensuring the ability to manage uncontrolled movement of people, etc. questions, implementation of four measures has been started and continues, whereas seven measures have not been implemented. The legal framework does not specify which institution should monitor the implementation of these measures and which institution should assess whether the planned measures are sufficient and appropriate for responding to possible threats.

For example, local and regional governments have encountered a situation that the planned provision is not sufficient while fulfilling the preventive measure on the controlled mass evacuation of the population for temporary accommodation, catering and social care of the population<sup>8</sup> and providing support to the civilian population of Ukraine provided for in the action plan, and no document has determined what local and regional governments should provide of 2% of the planned provision of the population registered in the administrative territory of that local or regional government.

### The civil protection and disaster management system lacks a strong system coordinating institution

The effective functioning of the civil protection and disaster management system in Latvia lacks a strong coordinating, development-directing and monitoring institution of deconcentrated and decentralized disaster management system, which would provide disaster management subjects with advice and support in the development of civil protection plans, monitor the progress of plan development and execution, propose improvements to the system, evaluate the need to establish multi-sector disaster management measures, organise exercise and expert engagement in disaster management, and lead and coordinate multi-sector or national disaster management as needed.

### System readiness is not tested in regular exercises

The country has not established a system that would ensure the planning and conducting of exercises necessary for the operation of the civil protection system and would cover the regular participation of all involved stakeholders by preparing for various crises in exercises in this way, checking the adequacy of the measures provided for in the plans, the skills of the staff and the sufficiency of resources. The audit findings audit show that the issue of organizing exercises, evaluating their



results, and making improvements is largely left to the discretion of each disaster management subject, participating institutions and enterprises.

The leading institutions of civil protection, the Ministry of the Interior and the State Fire and Rescue Service, do not have complete information about what civil protection exercises and trainings are planned and what have been conducted in the country. There is also insufficient monitoring of the elimination of deficiencies found in the state civil protection exercises and the implementation of the recommendations, leaving the findings in the exercises without due attention and not making the necessary improvements in the civil protection system.

Although local and regional governments have a wide range of mandate in response and recovery in virtually all disasters, the National Civil Protection Plan and also municipal civil protection plans only stipulate exercise for municipal civil protection commissions after regular municipal elections, which are intended to inform new members of civil protection commissions about their rights and duties. Such exercises are not sufficient and cannot be considered as civil protection exercises, which would allow the responsible officials of local and regional governments to prepare and train for crisis situations and their management fully.

At the same time, the audit has identified areas in which exercises are conducted regularly, preparedness for crises is trained, and the appropriateness and compliance of the measures provided for in the plans are checked in the exercises. For example, a system has been established and operating in disaster medicine, which ensures regular and planned exercise of the disaster medicine system, as well as regular annual exercises are provided to test civil-military cooperation.

#### State material reserves without funding for their provisions for a long time

The formation of the country's material reserves has also been neglected. At least for the last four years, funding from the state budget for the formation of state material reserves has not been allocated, although it has been requested of 6 to 8 million euros every year during this period. The State Audit Office considers that the funding necessary for the formation of state material reserves should be included in the basic funding of civil protection and should not be requested as additional funding in the order of priority measure applications. During the COVID-19 pandemic, personal protective equipment and other necessary goods were procured using the capacity of defence sector, instead of the mechanisms provided for in the system of civil protection and national material reserves. There are also uncertainties about the opportunities of local and regional governments to participate in the provision of state material reserves and the possibilities of using state material reserves in a crisis.

---

If crisis preparedness is not trained in exercises regularly and the adequacy of the measures provided for in the plans is not checked, no civil protection plan will help in crisis management.

## Key recommendations

After the audit, 17 recommendations are issued aimed at:

- Strengthening the disaster management system of Latvia and facilitating its preparedness for a crisis by clearly determining the distribution of competences of disaster management subjects and taking measures to improve the deconcentrated and decentralized disaster management system;
- Improving the National Civil Protection Plan and municipal civil protection plans by stipulating specific measures, execution deadlines and the division of responsibilities of the responsible institutions, thus ensuring that civil protection plans are realistically usable for disaster management;
- Strengthening the system of monitoring the execution of civil protection plans and ensuring methodological support for drafting municipal civil protection plans;
- Ensuring the formation of state material reserves in the required amount and defining a role of local and regional governments in the formation and use of state material reserves;
- Drafting a state-level document in the medium term by envisaging the organization of exercises at all levels (national, regional, and local) and monitoring the elimination of deficiencies found in civil protection exercises and the implementation of recommendations.

## References

- <sup>1</sup> Civil protection for inclusive recovery. World Reconstruction Conference 4. May 13-14, 2019. <https://www.gfdrr.org/en/events/WRC4/session2c>, viewed on 1 August 2022.
- <sup>2</sup> ANO Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030. Available at [https://www.preventionweb.net/files/43291\\_sendaiframeworkfordrren.pdf](https://www.preventionweb.net/files/43291_sendaiframeworkfordrren.pdf), viewed on 1 August 2022.
- <sup>3</sup> Section 2 of the Law on Civil Protection and Disaster Management. The new Law on Civil Protection and Disaster Management will ensure maximum safety of people, environment, and property. Jurista Vārds, 14 July 2015. <https://juristavards.lv/zinas/266966-jaunais-civilas-aizsardzibas-un-katastrofas-parvaldisanas-likums-maksimali-nodrosinas-cilveku-vides-un-ipasuma-drosibu/>, viewed on 1 August 2022.
- <sup>4</sup> A crisis is a serious threat to existing structures and values in a situation where important decisions need to be made urgently in conditions of great uncertainty. The crisis creates the need to make quick decisions that can have far-reaching consequences. Uncertainty in a crisis arises from the fact that the development of the situation is not clearly predictable, crises are often unprecedented, therefore existing knowledge is insufficient, and it is also impossible to ensure processes in everyday conditions (Crisis management coordination and capacities. European Public administration country knowledge. European Commission, Directorate-General for Structural Reform Support (DG REFORM), October 2020, p. 6).
- <sup>5</sup> Multi-risk assessments determine the combined risk of multiple hazards that occur simultaneously or follow each other within a short period of time because they are interdependent or are caused by the same triggering event or hazard, or that pose the same risks elements (vulnerable/exposed elements) without chronological coincidence (EC 21.12.2010 working document “Risk assessment and mapping guidelines for disaster management”, SEC(2010) 1626 final wording. Available at [http://vvc.gov.lv/index.php?route=product/category&path=60\\_109\\_110\\_116\\_145&page=5](http://vvc.gov.lv/index.php?route=product/category&path=60_109_110_116_145&page=5), viewed on 4 April 2022).
- <sup>6</sup> Annex 33 of the National Civil Protection Plan (approved by Cabinet Order No 476 of 26 June 2020 “On the National Civil Protection Plan”) “Disaster management measures in case of war, military invasion, or threats thereof”.

- <sup>7</sup> Annex 35 of the National Civil Protection Plan (approved by Cabinet Order No 476 of 26 June 2020 “On the National Civil Protection Plan”) “Action plan for controlled mass population evacuation and relocation in the event of a military invasion, disaster, or threat thereof”.
- <sup>8</sup> Article 1 of preventive measures, Annex 35 of the National Civil Protection Plan (approved by Cabinet Order No 476 of 26 June 2020 “On the National Civil Protection Plan”) “Action plan for controlled mass population evacuation and relocation in the event of a military invasion, disaster, or threat thereof”.